

eternal now. What God does in purpose he does from eternity. For him to change his mind, or in any way alter his determination is a natural impossibility. *"I am the Lord I change not."* His design in sending his Son into our world was not a more expedient, nor device to remedy an unexpected evil, which had arisen under the Divine government; on the contrary, it was a great moral fact, to which the eye of God turned from eternity—a fact, also, which constituted a central point in the dispensations of providence, and the administration of grace. It was not simply an accident, nor contingency, it was a gracious arrangement which had been planned in eternity. John 3:16, dwelt in eternity as a thought; in the fulness of time that thought manifested its eternal purpose to all life.

Second.—We are taught that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Inspired Word of God. Immediately after the fall an intimation was given to Adam that Christ, as "the seed of the woman," should bruise, by his great atoning sacrifice, "the serpent's head." The same promise, in other words, was made to Abraham: *"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."* This language far transcends anything that could be ascribed to Abraham's son, Isaac. It is in Christ only that the words find their full accomplishment, and here we are not left merely to inference: the Apostle Paul thus interprets the promise, "now to Abraham, and his seed, were the promises made. He saith not and to seeds, as of many: but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ."

We have also a reference to the coming of Jesus, in the sublime prediction uttered by Baalim: *"I shall see him but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel."* Moses refers to the same Saviour when he thus instructs his people: "The Lord thy God shall raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, unto him shall ye hearken."

In all the prophecies regarding the coming Christ, the most minute circumstances are particularly specified. Jacob marks distinctly the time of his coming. His miraculous conception is shown by Isaiah. Micah locates his birth place. The manner of his coming is graphically put by Zechariah and Malachi, the last of the Hebrew seers, predicts the surprise attending his advent. Indeed all the leading circumstances connected with the Savior's coming into the world have been precisely given by the prophets, and have each been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, whose birth we celebrate on Christmas day.

This leads to the *third* truth taught by the Christmas season, the Incarnation of

of Christ. Here we enter on a subject which should be approached with the profoundest reverence. Will God really live with us on earth? We can only reply in the light of the truth. Listen—*"and shall call his name Immanuel"* i. e., *"God with us."* Christ, then, is God with us, God in our nature, God manifest in the flesh. Again, *"The word was made flesh and dwelt among us"* *"The Word"*—that being who is said to be in the beginning with God, who was himself God. As God he is represented as creating all things. So, he that was in the beginning with God, who created all things, who was himself God, *"was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*

Here the spirit of unbelief inquires, "How can these things be?" "Who can hear this hard saying?" I can but suggest an answer: While the incarnation is mysterious, while it transcends the highest exercise of reason, it is not contrary to reason. Our great Creator must necessarily support and sustain, animate and influence human nature, as he does the nature of every being dependent on Him. Nor is there anything irrational in supposing that this connection may become closer, and more intimate until it rises into the nearest possible union.

Still we stumble at the mystery which the word of God frankly admits. We say, are we bound to believe and accept what we cannot understand? Then reference is made to the union of the Divine and human natures in the person of Christ, which is a hidden thing to the most gifted mind on earth, and perhaps to the highest angel in glory. But in receiving the incarnation we are not required to believe how the two natures are united, what we are expected to believe is the fact that such a union has taken place. And while the nature of this union is a mystery, the fact is a plain and palpable thing, patent even to the weakest intellect. This fact, so clear and simple, is taught by Christmas, in an appeal, not to our credulity but to our reason. We turn, during this blessed season, to the Lord Jesus Christ, as a Divine person, because, God, he is *"mighty to save."* We look to him as the perfect man, for as man, he is in sympathetic touch with us. We cling to him as God and man, because as the God-man, he is *"all our salvation and all our desire."*

But this precious Christ is coming again. This we, also, learn from Christmas. Each day brings us nearer the second advent, when Christ shall appear, not as Jesus of Nazareth, the man of sorrows, nor the crucified Saviour, but as the Lord of glory. *"Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him."*

The first advent is the pledge and guarantee of the second. When the old Hebrew chanted the Messianic songs in the temple services, he only anticipated the angel convoy that sung over Bethlehem's manger cradle, nearly nineteen centuries ago, *"There is this day born in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."* Now we go back to Jewish poetry for the prelude to our hymns, as we look forward to the Christ who is coming again, and thus respond to the inspirations of the spirit; *"Behold he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills."*

During the Christmas season, amid our home happinesses and social festivities and functions, may there linger with us those profounder feelings, inspired from the sacred meaning of the birth of Christ, leading us to acknowledge God's mercy and renew our covenant vows.

CHRIST'S APPROVAL

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Very often the temptation comes to Christians to long for the cordial approval of men in respect to their work or their attitude towards certain questions of morals and business. And it is actually true that if some Christians fail to get the approval of certain people of the world who are in good social positions they feel very badly. It is true that it is not wrong to receive the approval of good people when one has pursued a right course. Indeed, one ought to receive such approval of well-doing; and yet, unless one be very watchful of himself, he will become more desirous of man's approval of his right doing than he is of God's approval of the same. Our supreme desire should always be that of having, above all things else, our Lord's approval of the course which we ought to pursue; and we should seek such a thing before we engage in a proposed work, rather than to first go at it and then ask God to approve of it. A very able and devout minister says, "Sweeter to me than the strains of an Aeolian harp when swept by a soft breeze of a summer's night; sweeter than the honey that Jonathan's staff touched when weary in the pursuit of his foes; more precious than the brightest jewels that ever sparkled in mountain caves or in ocean depths is the one plaudit of my Master. I have ceased to care what men think of me, or say of me, but I do hunger and crave for that word, 'Well done!' I want Jesus to approve me, and if he will, I care for nothing else under this whole bending heaven, not another thing." This is a splendid summit to stand upon. With such a spirit ruling one he can afford to be indifferent to the frowns or flatteries of men.

Charity is love with its sleeves rolled up and at work.